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XXII.—*Notes on the Manners and Customs of the People about Little Popo, Bight of Benin.* By Captain LEVESON WILDMAN, R.N.

[*Read November 7th, 1865.*]

HAVING been obliged to remain on shore at Little Popo (an African town on the Bight of Benin) for some time, with peculiar facilities, from the nature of my duty, of observing and obtaining a knowledge of the laws, customs, etc., of the place, I made notes of what I thought would interest people in England.

The town, from its position on the shore of the sea to the south, and on the banks of a large and long lagoon on the north, ought to be, next to Lagos, the most important trading town between Cape St. Paul's and Cape Formosa; though, owing to wars, continued for years, but little trade has been carried on.

The people are the most cleanly I have seen in any part of the world, every man, woman, and child washing all over with native soap twice every day. Those who are rich do this at home, the poorer people at wells dug near the lagoon; the women and girls at wells kept for their use, and the men at others, or in the lagoon.

The women, when young, have beautiful figures, and, from carrying weights on their heads, are very upright. Until a girl is married, her dress is not extensive, as they merely wear one, two, or three rows of beads round their waists, above the hips, and a narrow strip of cloth, brought from the centre of the row of beads in front to the centre of the same behind. When married, they wear a cloth folded round the waist, reaching to the knees, and another cloth folded closely round the body under the arms, above the breast. The men, with the exception of the richer people, have a cloth wrapped round their waist, reaching to the knees, and another over and under the shoulders. This last cloth is always thrown off one shoulder when they meet a superior, as a mark of respect. They are all very much afraid of the Fetish charms and the Fetish priests, and are most superstitious.

The houses in the town are built on both sides of the lagoon, and are thatched two or three feet thick with dry grass and reeds, the thatching on the different houses nearly joining throughout the town. The sun dries this thatch like tinder, consequently fires are greatly feared. The following is a description of a very good specimen of a native gentleman's house: "In the centre is a large court, the ground being made hard with mud and sand

mixed ; a long Fetish pole stands in the centre, and a small Fetish hut carefully thatched over. The court is formed by the house proper on one side, and opposite and parallel to this house is one of the same size ; on the left side of the court is a small low cottage nearly joining both big houses, only leaving space enough between itself and the big houses to allow of doorways ; on the right is a wall shutting the court out from the street ; the principal entrance is in this wall."

The larger houses are one-storied, built of mud and sand, the walls very thick and whitewashed. The ground floor is invariably used as the family burying ground for the head of the house. A balcony runs round the first floor towards the court ; the thatch projects eight or nine feet beyond the pillars, which on this side are carried up until they meet the thatch ; this keeps the sun and rain out. On the other side there is no covering to the balcony. The rooms inside are three in number ; one good sitting-room, with doors and windows opening on to both balconies, and two good bedrooms opening off the sitting-room ; outside on the balcony is a smaller bedroom. In the sitting-room are two large French looking-glasses in black frames ; the walls are quite smooth and whitewashed, ornamented with blue and black cornice and mouldings ; the windows are closed by simple wooden shutters ; the furniture consists of a sofa, some common chairs, a rocking-chair, and French dining-table. The bedrooms are whitewashed and decorated in the same way as the sitting-room ; the beds, good, roomy, old fashioned four-posters, with neither top nor curtain (except musquito-curtains, if necessary).

This is, of course, a very favourable specimen of the native merchant's house ; but all try to have them built separately round a court. When a man has only two houses, and two walls round his court, he lives in one, and his wives and their women in the other. When there are three or four houses round the court, he lives in one, his wives in another, and the other or others he gives to his unmarried sisters and brothers.

The head of the house is always buried in the ground floor ; a grave is dug inside the large room which occupies all the lower part of the house. The head man's wife is also buried in the same place. The ceremony of burial is this, as the natives tell you : "big fellow" dies, his body is "dressed fine" ; it is then put in a chair in his room ; his feet put into a large brass pan. Two of his sons and two of his daughters, his eldest sister, and his nephew by her, are now told quietly to come. The native general of the district is also called. They all come to the house and see the body. Having examined it and seen that the "big fellow" has not been poisoned, they say, "Put him into the box." The box is made the length of the body, about three feet broad,

four feet high, with a round top fitted with hinges. The body is now put into the box. The sons and daughters give about ten dollars each; the nephew about eight dollars; the sister about twenty dollars; the native general sixteen dollars. This is all put into the box with the body. A decanter full of rum, a tumbler, a decanter of water, silk cloths, a round English hat, a long pipe filled with tobacco, a bottle of English lavender-water, a small looking-glass and comb, two or three silk handkerchiefs, two plates, a knife, fork, and spoon, are also put into the box. Each of the sons, daughters, his sister, and nephew, give silk cloths to cover the body.

A grave is dug in the lower room, and plastered round inside; half way up the grave bars are placed across. The box (or coffin) is rested on these bars, and covered over with a concrete of mud and sand. The room is cleared and cleaned, the windows shut, candles being kept lighted for about a week.

The following prayer is then said in the native language by the eldest sister, when the coffin is put into the ground: "Dear brother, well! to-day you have turned back from us, we cannot see you any more; you may go straight to God, you can know yourself whether you have done any bad against God. He will judge. I lived in the world with you, and do not think that you 'make any bad'; but if so, God will know it. If God take you, lay down quiet, it is all well; if any one poisoned you, send your spirit to take the man who did it away."

The sons and daughters all speak also much to the same effect. The nephew asks the dead man's spirit to intercede with God to keep all his family, of which he was the head when alive, from all bad ways.

The death is kept quiet for about four months, and is then made public, and "the customs" held. They are as follows: First day. Fire guns, drink rum. Second day. Early in the morning fire guns, relations dance and beat drum, calling out "drink plenty rum!" Third day. They rest. Fourth day. Fire gun, dance, beat drum, "drink plenty rum!" give away cloth. This continues for fifteen days. Sixteenth day. All the deceased's children wash and "dress fine", and carry the dead man's chair into the bush. All the people in the town are given powder, to be ready to fire muskets when the chair is brought back from the bush. One of the sons of the dead man is "dressed fine" and put into the chair, which is now brought into the house. All the people fire muskets and big cannon. Three tables are now laid for dinner; a bullock killed, goats, fowls, ducks, etc. The head men of the town are called. The head men take one table; the women, the second table; the dead man's sons, the third table. When they have all finished eating, they fill a tumbler half full of rum,

IV.—*Contributions to the Natural History of the Iranians.*
By M. KANIKOFF.

[*Read January 10th, 1865.*]

WHATEVER may be the convictions of natural philosophers on the fixity of species in the vegetable or animal reigns, the absolute application of this principle to man seems to me quite impossible. Man is endowed with a privilege of keeping up the traditions of his past, and whenever the ethnologist has seriously inquired into the history of races, he has been forcibly brought to admit the existence of a savage or natural or primitive race, which, by gradual transformations, and under the influence of various agencies, has taken at last the form peculiar to the majority of individuals of this race, considered at any given moment.

In new societies, formed, if I may say so, under the eyes of attentive observers, the inquiry into their origin offers little or no difficulty. Thus, nobody would be embarrassed to discover the primitive type of Turks, founders of the empire of the Sultans, in the populations of the same family wandering on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. Under the Seldjukians, they invaded the western provinces of ancient Persia, and then, by degrees, made their progress to the west, through Asia Minor. But for a people, like the Persians, whose antiquity is coeval with the earliest recollections of mankind, and whose country was so frequently and so radically overthrown by mighty social commotions, the task of finding out the place where we can hope to meet their primitive type, is much more difficult, and would appear, at first sight, quite impossible.

For in a very large class of natural phenomena, the exact point of their origin is indicated only by directions which converge from different sides, and we can never hope to discover the true position of their common intersection. The inquiry into the place of the cradle of a nation, and especially that of the origin of the peoples of the Iranian family, presents the same peculiarities.

It is generally known that the highest point of the old world, the plateau of Thibet and the chain of Himalaya, divides four different nationalities: the Chinese to the east, the Turanians to the north, the Hindus to the south, and the Iranians or Persians to the west. Philological and historical researches have established also the community of origin of the Hindus and of the Iranians, who, at a very remote period, dwelt together on the plateaus of High Asia, under the common name of Arians. I will not recur to the proofs of these facts, and I take them as a founda-

from the house, if they are found out twice, and the sweetheart is fined. The first time the wife is tied up and then flogged with a small bamboo on the shoulders; the husband tells her mother that her daughter has been naughty, and been flogged, and that if she does it again she will be driven from the house after being well flogged. The second time, after the wife has been flogged and driven away, the "co-respondent" is taken to the head man, who acts as judge in Sir Cresswell Cresswell's court, and fined according to his means. If the naughty girl is a slave wife she is well flogged and put into prison, and her lover fined heavily.

When a man owes a large sum of money and cannot pay, all his family are pawned until the amount is paid. If he has no family, he is taken to the king (nominally over many towns) with twelve dollars. The king orders him to be buried in the ground in the bush with the earth stamped down all round him, just leaving his head out; a pot is put over his head at night. At daybreak it is removed and left off until the evening, when it is again put on. This is done until he is dead, which happens generally in four days if the sun is very hot, five or six days if cool. The turkey buzzards soon find out a man so buried, and circle round him for a little time, and then settle and devour the flesh from his head, first picking out his eyes. When a man is so punished, the creditor has no further claim on his family for the debt. If the debtor runs away, his family are seized by the creditor and kept until the debt is paid. In this case, the man's brother generally pawns his family (or slaves if he has any) and redeems them when he can get enough money to pay the debt. In the case of a slave who is held in pawn for a debt, dying, he or she is not buried, but placed on the top of a platform (two of which there are at the end of each town) made for the purpose; the body is left there, and the bones on the ground where they tumble to pieces, to allow the debtor to take "what belongs to him, if he should pay his debt." Fathers pawn children, husbands wives, and masters slaves; and if the debt is small, pawn themselves until it is paid. The burying alive, like all native laws and customs, is rigidly enforced. At Quitta it is a punishment for murder as well as for debt.

Marriage.—When a man wishes to get any girl as his wife, he sends a "dash" of two gallons of rum and a piece of cloth to the girl's family. If the girl is very young, she is left with her father and mother until old enough to be married. Every year cowries and cloths are given to the parents for the child. When she is old enough, the affianced husband buys different sorts of cloth and beads, according to his means, and two demi-johns of rum—these are given to the girl's mother. Also plenty of cloths of silk if he be rich, of cotton if he be poor, for the girl, who also

receives from her husband two bottles of lavender water, a comb, pomatum, and a sum of money, varying from eight dollars to twenty, according as the man is rich or poor. All the man's family give him presents, some a dollar, some many dollars; others a shilling, but all must by custom give something; his father gives eight or ten dollars. When these presents have been given, a "good day" (Saturday) is waited for. The girl is then in the evening taken to her husband, she is dressed in her finest silk cloths and scented in the most powerful manner with lavender; her mother and father accompany her to the husband's house.

In the morning (Sunday), very early, after the girl's father and mother have spoken to the new husband and wife, the girl is taken by her mother to her father's house to be washed and dressed. Guns are fired, and the man's family come to his house and drink his health in rum and palm wine, and then have breakfast, the girl returning to his house fresh dressed, washed, and scented. After breakfast, she is taken back to her mother's house, with a spirit case of rum; in the afternoon she returns, and all dance and sing. Rum is given away freely about four o'clock. The girl goes back to her mother to be well washed all over and scented; in the evening she is brought back to her husband's house, plenty of women coming with her; rum and cloth are given to these women, and they sing songs appropriate to the occasion. The girl is brought into her husband's room every night by a number of women for three days; then six women bring her for eight days; and the custom is then finished by the newly-made wife killing a goat and giving her husband a good dish of it. This is the end.

A man may have as many wives as he can afford to keep; a very rich man generally has about forty, a poor man about two or four; but directly any man gets money and fancies any girl, he marries her, no matter how many wives he may have at the time. A Portuguese named De Souza, who lived near Little Popo, had more than a hundred wives. When the first child (of all the wives) is four months old, it is taken to show to the man's relations, and they "dash" the child.

There are some very curious beads found in the bush near Little Popo, which are very much valued all over the West Coast of Africa. They are dug from the ground, and no one knows their real history. The natives believe that they "walk like snake; directly they see one, kill him, he break to pieces." When the hole is found where they live, the bush men dig in the ground and find plenty, dead and alive; they break up and sell them. There are two kinds, one yellow, one blue, the yellow one has different patterns. There is the large river snake with two

horns in his head ; the natives say, " he have 'em in body." This is all my informant could tell me ; he and all the people of Popo thoroughly believe this. The " coast people " in general deceive the " bush people," but with the Popo beads the case is reversed.

These beads are very curious. I can only think that they are old beads and have been buried for centuries ; imitations have been tried in England and Germany, but they may be discovered at a glance even by an inexperienced white man who has only seen the real Little Popo bead a few times. The value of these beads is very great, being actually worth their weight in gold—but they are light.
